



Wisconsin E-Brief for Partnership Schools

March 2011

An e-newsletter from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
Community Learning and Partnerships Team
to promote family-school-community partnerships for children's learning

Low-Cost Partnership Activities for Schools

Is your school looking for ways to reach out to families that cost little more than the time to do them? Here are a few ideas from the [Community Learning and Partnerships Team](#) at DPI:

1. Make a positive phone call home for every child in your class.
2. Send or e-mail home three questions parents can ask children about what they learned that week, along with information or links to answer and explore the questions.
3. Have students decorate three post cards which teachers can use to send home with positive news.
4. Place daily school announcements on the school website.
5. Host a potluck-style "classroom supper," planned by students, parents, and teachers, so parents can get to know one another and teachers.
6. Set up a phone-tree "buddy system" for parents, new and experienced, who would like a mentor to help them navigate the system, answer questions, and keep them up on school news.
7. Reward volunteers with a ticket for one free school lunch, redeemable on a day of their choice.
8. Have students interview parents on what their biggest challenge was at that age. Ask them to think about what has changed and what hasn't. Send home a summary of (anonymous) responses.

New Research from NIPS

Principal and District Support are Critical for Effective Partnerships

Principal and district active support for family and community involvement is critical for good quality, school-based partnership programs, according to a new study by Joyce Epstein and colleagues. Principals were more likely to actively support partnerships when their district leaders, in turn, stressed the importance of partnerships. Active principals encouraged the school partnership team to meet regularly, to write plans, and to evaluate their efforts. Active principals also frequently encouraged other teachers and all families to participate in planned involvement activities.

An article about the study, published in February in Educational Administration Quarterly, is attached. Other findings of the study:

- **Leadership and action on partnerships were more important than demographics** in affecting whether districts and schools developed and improved family-community programs. Most schools in the study had high levels of poverty and diversity, but were able to establish effective programs and outreach to families **if** their district leaders and principals were supportive.

- **It takes at least three years to establish good partnership programs.** Schools in districts that provided assistance and evaluation of partnerships for at least 3 years offered more basic and advanced partnership activities than did schools in districts without consistent partnership program development. Schools supported over time by their districts were more likely to write plans for family and community involvement, identify a budget, and implement activities for the six types of involvement.
- Schools were also more likely **to involve families in children's homework and to share best practices** with other schools when district leaders provided funding and technical assistance.

Epstein said the study shows that it's no longer enough for districts to monitor schools only for compliance with NCLB requirements for federal parent involvement funds. Districts also must help schools improve the quality of their partnership programs and strengthen the partnership-building skills of district school administrators.

Partnership Question of the Month

How does an Action Team Help a School Strengthen and Sustain Partnerships?

Many positive encounters happen among families and school staff every day. A Partnership Action Team makes it possible for those encounters to be well-planned, long-lasting, and connected to learning. The Action Team works to extend those benefits to the family members of all children in the school.

Take a Family-Friendly School Self-Assessment <http://www.dpi.wi.gov/fscp/pdf/tk-fam-frnd-assmt.pdf> and read more about this question at <http://www.dpi.wi.gov/fscp/act-tm-q2.html>.

Partnership Resources

Practical Information Parents Can Use

How do I help my child when the homework is so different from what I did in school? The National Education Association and National Parent Teacher Association have jointly developed a series of two-page guides to provide parents and caregivers with answers to questions on numerous learning-related topics to encourage their children's success in school. Available at <http://www.nea.org/parents>.

A Parent Involvement Checklist from Project Appleseed lists sample practices, challenges, and results for each of the Six Types of Family Involvement: <http://www.projectappleseed.org/chklst.html>.

Mark Your Calendar

March 23: Beyond Random Acts of Partnership Conference: Building the Climate for Student Success at the Milwaukee Hilton City Center. Join parents, educators, and community leaders for a day of roundtables and conversation to learn and share best practices for creating schools that welcome all families and engage all students in learning. Register at <http://www.dpi.wi.gov/fscp/index.html>.

May 1: NNPS members should submit **Promising Partnership Practices** for publication in the 2011 edition. Visit <http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/ppp/index.htm> for more information.

Grant Opportunities

Kohl's Cares Scholarship Program – recognizes kids 6-18 who make a positive impact in the community through volunteerism. This year, Kohl's plans to recognize more than 2100 kids with more than \$415,000 in scholarships and prizes ranging from \$50 gift cards to \$10,000 scholarships for post-secondary education. www.kohlskids.com

ING: Unsung Heroes Awards -- The ING Unsung Heroes awards program recognizes innovative and progressive thinking in education through monetary awards. Maximum award: \$25,000. Eligibility: full-time educators, teachers, principals, paraprofessionals, or classified staff members with effective projects that improve student learning at an accredited K-12 public or private school. Deadline: April 30, 2011. <http://ing.us/about-ing/citizenship/childrens-education/ing-unsung-heroes>.

The Public Education Network publishes several funding opportunities that may be useful to fund activities from a One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships. For a complete list of grants and awards, visit: http://www.publiceducation.org/newsblast_grants.asp.

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The **Wisconsin E-Brief for Partnership Schools** is a monthly newsletter of news, events, research, and promising practices to keep your school, district, or organization focused and moving forward on family-school-community partnerships for children's learning. You are receiving this e-brief because of your involvement in a partnership-related event or initiative sponsored by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI). *If you prefer NOT to receive this online newsletter, please reply to this email with the subject line: "Remove from list."*

Your comments, ideas, and stories are vital to this newsletter. Please tell us your achievements in promoting children's learning with families and community members, as well as your challenges and questions. Partnership practitioners learn most from each other, so ***let's hear from you!***